

VZCZCXRO5352
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHMOS
DE RUEHMK #0727 1161428
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 261428Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4579
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHBVAKS/COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000727

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/26/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KNNP](#) [PTER](#) [BA](#) [IR](#) [REGION](#) [OFFICIALS](#)
SUBJECT: UPS AND DOWNS IN BAHRAIN'S RELATIONS WITH IRAN

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe. Reason: 1.4
(B)(D)

¶1. (C) In a meeting covering several subjects (septels), the Ambassador April 26 asked MFA Assistant Under Secretary for Coordination and Follow Up Shaikh Abdul Aziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa about the latest developments in Bahrain's relations with Iran, most notably President Ahmadi-Nejad's recent phone call to the King and Iranian NSC Secretary General Ali Larijani's April 23 visit to Bahrain. Observing that Iran seemed to be increasingly engaged with GCC countries (Rafsanjani's recent visit to Kuwait was another example), the Ambassador asked Shaikh Abdul Aziz for an assessment of recent Iranian contacts with Bahrain.

¶2. (C) Shaikh Abdul Aziz stated that the Ahmadi-Nejad phone call was generated by Iranian irritation about two recent incidents with Bahrain. First, Larijani had planned to visit Bahrain several weeks ago as part of a tour of the Gulf. King Hamad was out of the country then, and the request was made for a meeting with the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince, however, refused to meet with Larijani, so Larijani canceled his plans to stop in Bahrain. Ahmadi-Nejad in his phone call to the King, asked that the meeting be rescheduled. The King agreed, and met Larijani on April 23. Shaikh Abdul Aziz did not have a readout of the King's discussion with Larijani. Press reports stated that the conversation focused on Iran's nuclear program, and security and stability in the region.

¶3. (C) Second, Ahmadi-Nejad called to complain about comments made by Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid following Egyptian President Mubarak's well-publicized remarks questioning the loyalty of Shia in Arab countries. In his public reaction, Shaikh Khalid said that the support of Bahrain's Shia for the nation were well-known and clear over the course of history. But not wanting to be seen as criticizing Mubarak, Shaikh Abdul Aziz said, Shaikh Khalid added that there were elements in Iran that were "playing with fire" and inciting problems between Iran and the Arabian Gulf countries by encouraging sectarianism. The "playing with fire" comment made front-page headlines in Bahrain the next day.

¶4. (C) Shaikh Abdul Aziz stated that the Iranian Ambassador called him at home at 8:00 AM that morning (a weekend) to complain about Shaikh Khalid's statement. Shaikh Abdul Aziz told the Iranian that Shaikh Khalid was not accusing the Iranian government, but rather non-governmental elements. When the Iranian Ambassador persisted in his complaint, Abdul Aziz reminded him of a previous conversation the two had had when Shaikh Abdul Aziz had complained about statements made in Iran by Bahrain senior cleric Ayatollah Mohammed Sanad, who suggested that a 1970s UN referendum on Bahrain's status as an independent country (and not a part of Iran) should be reheld. At the time, the Iranian Ambassador had said that the Iranian government should not be held accountable for statements by non-government elements. This was the kind of element, Shaikh Abdul Aziz said, that Shaikh Khalid was

referring to in his comment.

15. (C) Shaikh Abdul Aziz said that, prior to these recent incidents, Bahraini-Iranian relations had in fact reached an all-time high after difficult times in recent years. He noted that there had been a high tempo of bilateral visits, and business was increasing between the two countries in "huge" amounts. The basis of the relationship was always economic, and that part has been getting better. The Ambassador acknowledged that GCC countries had their own reasons for remaining engaged with their Iranian neighbor, but noted that the issue of relations with Iran would most likely heat up as we look for ways to increase pressure on the Iranian regime, including the possibility of sanctions. The Bahrain government at the highest levels has repeatedly stated its firm opposition to nuclear weapons in Iran, and a key element in preventing that will be broad support for measures to increase pressure on the Iranian government.

MONROE